1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

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History

Kanem-Bornu: The Historical Background

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THIS BOOK is primarily an account of the way of life of a contemporary African people. However this particular group, unlike many others in Africa or elsewhere, has an ancient and well-documented history. The fact that such materials are available also means that we can observe the kingdom as it developed through time and obtain some appreciation for its continuity and change as one of the oldest political powers in Africa. I have therefore tried to bring together in summary form an account of Bornu history and its political development during the last millenium of southern Saharan history. In terms of the overall ethnographic task it is important to realize that it is within this historical stream that the contemporary way of life has come to be what it is. Indeed one of the most salient facts about Kanuri culture is the pride the people feel in their history; they believe that one cannot know them unless there is at the same time some understanding of their past. In order to do this I have written first an outline of the major events of this history, then analyzed the political development of the kingdom as it evolved through time. The details of the present political system are then taken up again in Chapter 6.

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Kanuri legends all take the Bornu kingdom back to the north and northeast of Lake Chad to the ancient kingdom of Kanem and before that to Yemen. Like many peoples of West Africa as far removed from one another as the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Fulani of Futa Djallon in Guinea, Kanuri traditions suggest that they as a people come originally from Yemen. It is said that a migrant Yemenite noble named Sef founded the royal dynasty of the Magumi Sefuwa. There is very little doubt that the ancient dynasty of the Sefuwa has been in fact the ruling line in Kanem-Bornu for over a thousand years. However, there is very little evidence except for the legend itself to support the theory that the Kanuri or their ancient leaders originate in Yemen.

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The problem of studying human origins scientifically is a fascinating one, but there are many pitfalls and a keen taste for skepticism is a primary requirement. The rules of the game are, however, quite easy. Simply ask what valid facts

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Finally in the late fourteenth century, a rebellious Bulala group east of Lake Chad upset the Magumi Sefuwa rulers of Kanem, who ultimately came to the southwest portion of the Chad basin to establish what later became the empire of Bornu.

The collapse of the great Kanem empire in the fourteenth century is attributed by tradition to internal civil wars resulting from the Bulala revolt against the Sefuwa dynasty. The ultimate cause is rationalized in legend by an alleged irreligious act of the seventeenth king or Mai of Kanem, one Dunama, (*ca.* 1220–1260 A.D.) who is supposed to have "laid the foundations for the ensuing disaster of the empire by opening the sacred talisman of Bornu" which subsequently provoked men of ambition to entreat against the state.[5] It may or may not be true, but it is very likely not the entire explanation even if we were to know what the "sacred talisman" was—which we do not; knowledge of its meaning and content have long since disappeared. Other reasons for the collapse of the kingdom besides that of a civil war against the Bulala can be suggested. The kingdom was in all likelihood not highly centralized and the nobles could quite easily unite, obtain outside help, and try to gain control. Indeed all of the traditions of the Bulala tell of them obtaining help from the Tubu of the central Sahara (a rebellious group who were tributary to Kanem) against the ruling Kanem dynasty.

Another factor is the nature of succession to the throne. Throughout the Sudan, and for as long as any traditions go back in Bornu, succession to the throne has always been open to those whose fathers have been monarchs. However, given many short reigns, this custom increases the number of contenders enormously and therefore exacerbates competition for royal office in the state so that the danger of civil wars and lack of unity is accelerated; the state is then much weakened as an effective political force. In other words, given a few short reigns, the possibility that more will follow becomes even greater unless a strong man with very strong backing emerges to quell the factions supporting various royal contenders. Finally it should be realized that Bornu was a much greener land than Kanem and it might have actually attracted the Kanem ruling group and their followers away from the drier, more inhospitable northern shores of Lake Chad. Certainly the kingdom of Kanem was not of such a nature that it suddenly collapsed when people (later to be called Kanuri) left. The Bulala clan assumed the leadership and Kanem continued as a sovereign state while the Kanuri tried, unsuccessfully at first, to reconquer their lost empire.

By the end of the fifteenth century the Sefuwa and their clan, the Magumi, had obtained sovereignty to the southwest of Lake Chad, and under a series of able monarchs they established their new kingdom of Bornu as a great power in the Sudan. The first of these rulers to organize and establish a really powerful state was a man named Ali Ghajedeni (*ca.* 1470–1500 A.D.), the forty-eighth monarch on the Sefuwa dynastic list. He built a new capital called Birni Ngazargamo, "the walled fortress," at the north end of Bornu and united this new kingdom under his control. Ali is supposed to have reconquered Kanem and re-established control over the Saharan trade while making war continually against Songhai to the west over the subjugation of the Hausa states and the east-west trade routes across the Sudan. His reign was followed by a series of others no less nota-

[5] H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, Vol. II, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., 1857), p. 637.

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social and moral life of the community. It is prophesied that morality and family life as it is now known could be destroyed if opposition parties ever came to power. Finally, it is always pointed out that opposition parties represent the Southern Nigerians and that a vote for such a group is a vote against Islam, the true religion, and a vote for paganism covered by a thin cloak of Christianity.

During the 1950s when there was an active local opposition party in Bornu under a Kanuri leader, attitudes to the opposition were more clearly seen. The British colonial officials dealt mostly with senior Kanuri members of the Native Authority. Both the British and these Kanuri leaders had an abhorrence of disorder, riots, or activities that could lead to such disturbances. It was thought that allowing Southern Nigerians to organize branches of their own party locally was one thing but having a Kanuri opposition party was quite another. Events proved them correct, for in 1958 riots broke out in Maiduguri between supporters of the N.P.C. and the Bornu Youth League. The ins and outs of these riots need not concern us here, but from that time on the B.Y.L. was crushed. Many of its local leaders fled to other parts of Nigeria or to neighboring Chad to reappear several years later and eventually to become loyal N.P.C. supporters. Today although other Nigerian parties are represented in Bornu, their supporters and local organizers are all non-Kanuri. Thus the emirate government is linked to Nigerian party politics through a one-party organization which represents the traditional authority system of the emirate.

The party and its place as a dominant element in Nigerian politics means that Kanuri leaders have open to them regional and federal appointments. There are Kanuri in the federal cabinet and in the various federal ministries. Up until January 1966, the political head of the N.P.C. and the Premier of the northern region was the Sarduana of Sokoto, and the Governor was Sir Kashim Ibrahim, the former Waziri of Bornu.[1] The old nineteenth century balance of power in this region between the empires of Bornu and Sokoto still remain, then, and both must be represented in the leading positions of this, the largest region of Nigeria.

In summary, Kanuri political organization is basically structured along the lines set up by the colonial era which were built onto those of pre-colonial times. As the emirate has developed a need for more modern political structures these have appeared and are continuing to appear as the society changes towards more modernization and the accumulation of social and economic development. Within this structure modes of behavior are still largely traditional as are the values and political ideology that give the present system its immediate and long range goals. Whether or not modernism and its values will eventually produce a clash with tradition or whether the change will continue to be as smooth and incremental as it has in the past is one of the key questions for the future.

[1] As this is being written the politics of Nigeria, and in all probability its constitutional make-up, are being changed by the effects of the military take-over of the federal government which occurred in January, 1966.

175 567 839 complex of empire since slaves, along with gold, ivory, and ostrich feathers, had been traded for centuries across the Sahara and fed into Mediterranean markets. Slaves were obtained by raiding the pagan peoples who inhabited the upland areas to the south and southeast of Bornu.

175 636 Throughout this time the Hausa people, immediately to the west of the Kanuri, were under the suzerainty of the empire of Bornu. Though the Hausa are much more numerous than the Kanuri, their level of political development had not advanced beyond city-states, which were under the control of the unified and 175 • 167 powerful Bornu empire. The gradual entry of the Fulani into the area eventually led to the downfall of the domination of Bornu over the Hausa states. The Fulani are a nomadic cattle people deriving from the Atlantic coast area to the distant west. By the early part of the nineteenth century, drifting continuously to the east, they had become numerous in Hausa 175 721 territory. In 1804 the Fulani, under Usuman dan Fodio, rose up in holy war and gained control over the Hausa city states. They succeeded in sacking and destroying Birni Ngazargamu, and were finally repelled when the Kanuri rulers obtained assistance from the Kanembu to the north.

175 439 The inability of the Bornu empire to resist Fulani attacks was an indication of its decline and decay, and this in turn was the result of a much larger historical process: the decline in importance of the western Sudan and the development of the coastal areas of West Africa. Whereas the Sudanese states had

648 To the immediate west of the Kanuri are the Hausas over whom
[101] the Kanuri once ruled. Signs of the early relationship between
[93] Hausa and Kanuri are still in evidence. The Hausa chief of Zinder, a large city in Niger north of Kano, still sent gifts to the Shehu of Bornu as a mark of allegiance upon being appointed to office by the French authorities. The Shehu in British Nigeria then sent him in return a ceremonial robe of office.

a 167 563 177 The Fulani have continued to infiltrate into Bornu and are numerous in the western sections of the province. In similar fashion, the Shuwa Arabs have in recent times been moving into Bornu from the east. The Shuwa represent the westernmost penetration of the Arabic-speaking African peoples. They are found concentrated in the southeastern sections of Bornu, in
[437] the region of Bama and Dikwa. Both the Fulani and the Shuwa
[463] are semi-nomadic pastoralists, living in a partially symbiotic relation with the agricultural Kanuri.

3. The Resistant Groups.

177 The Cameroon highlands, sixty miles southeast of Bama, remain the outpost of pagan peoples. The people of the Gwoza hills, one of the last "unpacified" areas in all Nigeria, still continue to resist their Moslem neighbors of the plains, as they had throughout the slave raiding of the Bornu empire. Some seventy thousand people, comprising a number of tribes and speaking several languages, live in the secure isolation of their mountain stronghold, resisting equally the penetration

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632 river. The compounds of several wealthy Hausa traders face the
[563] market-place in the western end of Lowan Kolo Kolo's ward. The
[463] butchers, who are almost all Hausa and have a Hausa head-man, are within Lowan Kolo Kolo's ward but fall under the jurisdiction of the Hausa Lowan.

632 563 The third ward making up the town of Geidam has only a sprinkling of Kanuri living there. It is the most populous ward of the three and is predominantly Hausa. Its Lowan is Serakin Garba, a prominent member of the Hausa community. This ward has been growing most rapidly in recent years, and the direction of expansion has been south and west, where whole new sections have grown up. Along the western border of the town, stretching southward, live all the Ibos and Yorubas, Southern Nigerians and predominantly Christian, numbering several hundred.
[366] A string of small canteens run by Ibos and Yorubas faces the
[368] western border. In this ward is to be found the church for
[273] Christian members of the Geidam community, and the Charity Hotel where beer is sold.

632 563 Ethnic stratification is very marked in Geidam. All southerners, Ibos and Yorubas, live in the Hausa ward along with almost the entire Hausa population of Geidam. Only a scattering
632 563 of Hausas are found in the Kanuri wards. Within the Kanuri wards
167 are found small clusters of other tribes, notably Bouzous and Dagara, serfs of the Tuareg who come down into the settled plains area to towns like Geidam, where they work at menial jobs for periods of time. When they have accumulated some money they re-

632 563 167 turn to their northern villages. A group of Bouzou work at camel transport, and live in a cluster near the slaughter-slab area. Another group of Bouzou work as water-carriers and come [162] to live in Geidam between agricultural seasons. They all, up to thirty in number, live in the compound of Lowan Ashek.

632 621 Lastly a group of pagans are to be found in a small hamlet called Koldi, about 400 yards northwest of the town proper. [162] There are forty-five households in Koldi, with a total popula- [622] tion of 134. Koldi has its own Bulama, but Lowan Ashek serves [651] as the Lowan of Koldi and is responsible for tax collection 632 there. The people of Koldi are largely pagan (kərdi), and mem- 621 563 bers of the following tribes are found there: Banana, Kim, Ka- 177 bam, Ngizim, Kabalia, Mandara, Kotoko, Gwoza and Fulani. Most of these are tribes found east and south of the Shari River, whose people are pagan or partially Islamized. This is the shatter-belt area between the Empires of Bornu and those of [302] Mandara and Bagirmi. The women of Koldi all do their hair in the Kanuri manner, and the people of Koldi are strongly acculturated to the Kanuri. In fact many Kanuri are found living in [771] Koldi. They are characterized primarily by their lax attitude [275] towards Islam, and are considered pagan because they brew millet beer there. No beer is brewed in Geidam proper, so that Kanuri youths wishing to partake of the local brew are forced to slip [534] away unseen to Koldi. Drumming can constantly be heard in the 632 evenings from the direction of Koldi. The people of Koldi all 621 have farms of millet in the surrounding area, but in addition [243] [285] [463]

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175 Mustapha, another holder of a great title, was promoted from
634 Magumeri District to Geidam District to replace Kaigama Zubairu.

175 Yerima Mustapha is of the family of Shuwa kabuna who came
634 into Bornu with Shehu Laminu. The Shuwa and Kanembu nobles who
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[167] entered Bornu at that time did not bear Kanuri titles. However, as they were the heads of Shuwa and Kanembu lineages (jili), their own names took on the semblance of titles. Two such titles which were perpetuated within Yerima Mustapha's family were "Laminu" and "Malam Tərab". Laminu Jitia, a sister's son of Malam Tərab, succeeded as head of the house of Malam Tərab, who had been the chima over Magumeri at the time of Shehu Umar (son of Shehu Laminu). The position of head of that house, with the accompanying title of "Malam Tərab" passed out of the hands of lineal descendants in succeeding generations when the Shehu appointed non-family men to the position. A son of Laminu Jitia, Aba Sanda Kura, was made Ajia of Magumeri, the original fief of Malam Tərab. He then took the title "Laminu", so that a new Kanuri title was created. Still later, the position of Ajia of Magumeri passed out of the hands of the "Laminu" family. The present Yerima Mustapha, a great-grandson of Laminu Jitia, held the title of "Laminu" from 1926 until 1938.

159 Yerima Mustapha was born in 1901. He received a primary
634 school education and became a Sanitation Inspector and Vac-
554 cinater in 1924. In 1932 he was made Ajia of Fune District, where he resided first at Ngəlzerma and later at Damagum. At that time he used the title "Laminu." The present Shehu of

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out of a very highly taxed District.(1) The net result was a high turn over in chiefs both at the District and village level, through the utilisation by the British of their powers of deposition of chiefs, and a continuation of Kanuri rather than British concepts of taxation.

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In 1914, a new Resident took over the province and began to strengthen the Emirate political structure at its center.(2) He instituted a Shehu's council with a Wasiri as its head, and issued instructions that no European officer was to give direct instructions to District Heads. All directives were to be made through the Shehu and his council. This council, starting originally with two members, grew steadily in size and function. By the late 1940's it resembled a kind of local cabinet with the Wasiri as its head under the titular headship of the Shehu and with each member having at least one portfolio. That is to say, the members of this Council have come more and more to function as the heads of civil service departments.

All African political organisation, both traditional and introduced, was called the Native Administration by Lugard and his followers and the Emirate departments of works, forestry, education, veterinary services, etc., were dubbed the N.A. departments, for that particular Emirate. This distinguished them from the government provincial departments who administered and guided the policies and actions of all the N.A.'s in the province.

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The newly introduced European governmental services demanded some degree of western education and trained clerks from other parts of Nigeria were brought into Bornu to fill the host of small jobs which were necessary to a growing administration.

(1) In the Mobber, Geidam, Magumeri and Nganzai District Notebooks, notations have been made throughout the colonial period of complaints by peasants who reported that they had moved from one district to another because of excessive taxation.

(2) In 1914, the British swiftly and with little opposition took over the German Cameroons, half of which were ceded to them after the War.

175 871 necessary to a growing administration. In Bornu, a provincial school was set up in Maiduguri in 1915 with eleven pupils which taught Hausa and Kanuri (using English script) and arithmetic.(1) Muslim religious knowledge and Arabic were also made part of the curriculum, while English did not come in until somewhat later. By 1916 there were 74 pupils all drawn from the ranks of the aristocracy.

According to the opinion of contemporary officials who have worked in several areas of northern Nigeria, European education in Bornu is far behind that of any other province in the region. Certainly most of the schools that can be seen today are usually less than 10 years old, so that education in the European sense of the word has only recently been made available in any appreciable extent to the people of Bornu. Today each District has at least one small elementary school and the provincial secondary school has been enlarged. 175 871 167 This dearth of western educated personnel has brought to Bornu many outsiders to fill the necessary jobs which the European and his record-keeping culture and technology require. Due to over-population and a much longer tradition of western education in their own area, a large number of these have been Ibo people from southeast Nigeria.

175 361 [132] In 1907 the British plan to rebuild the old 19th century capital of Kuka was abandoned due to the extreme aridity of the local area, and the capital was henceforth situated at Maiduguri on the Alo river basin. Kuka soon dwindled in size and became a rural village. 175 369 433 178 On the other hand, the new capital which had previously had a fairly large market could not produce enough grain to feed the suddenly expanded population which flowed in when it became the center of the Emirate. It was therefore found necessary from 1907 to 1914 to force

(1) Annual Report Bornu Province; 1915

175 439 items while cloth was the largest import. However from 1925 onwards, groundnuts increased in importance as an export crop. The 175 436 government introduced a sterling coin currency which slowly replaced the Maria Theresa dollar as the most generally accepted medium of exchange. In the annual report of 1915 there was a complaint by the Resident of Bornu that the European trading companies were not giving currency for purchases but were paying for goods in cloth which the native middlemen were then selling, sometimes at a loss, in order to obtain cash. This seems to indicate that by 1915 currency was in universal demand, and that barter trade was dying out. After some pressure by the government the European traders dropped their bartering practices and began to use the present system of cash credit. 175 441 452 The Companies advanced credit to a limited number of middlemen who then bought company goods for resale at local markets, and/or used the money to purchase export items for sale to the credit-advancing 175 441 452 563 Company. At first the African traders dealing with the Companies were few and their volume not impressive. The desire of the Europe- [167] ans to expand trading volume, plus the willingness and ability of Levantine traders to take larger amounts of credit, soon encouraged a small but very active minority of Arab speaking traders from North Africa, the Near East and the Sudan to enter Bornu. These acted as middlemen between the European trading Companies and the more numerous African traders. The result was that a small group of Arab-speaking traders were established in Maiduguri who absorbed a large proportion of the available credit from the European Companies and filtered it, second-hand as it were, into the economy of Bornu.

The European trade in Bornu, like that of many parts of

554 (d) barber - they are ignorant; they know bad things (fear of witch-
829 craft) and magical malevolence which is also attributed
[789] to hunters, medicine sellers, magicians and Koranic mallams.

554 (e) petty brokers - they take property to sell in the market that is
829 not their own, and then they give the money to
441 the property owner, but they never give the true amount, they always keep their own share, they can never be trusted. Good people could never do such work. A broker is not vertically related to others, he is an individual agent — it is often difficult to find out exactly where he lives. His non-attachment makes him less likely to be a person whom people can trust. There is also much reasonable experience behind his cheating, which many know of to their loss.

554 Kanuri notions of status are such that any person who takes
[558] up any of these occupations due to economic necessity is not supposed to be accorded as low a status as if he were born into the occupation. This idea gives support to the value placed upon upward mobility in
[775] Kanuri culture. One mallam told the writer that he had read in the Koran that people, who were of these low status occupations would never reach paradise, even if they were good and proper in their behaviour all their lives.

426 The lowest occupation status is that of money-lender, for
554 it is widely known that this practice is contrary to the edicts of the
577 Muslim religion. In real life this approbrium varies a great deal primarily because of the covert admiration given to money-lenders for their material success which allows them the cash surplus to loan for interest.

178 The colonial period has seen the growth of many new kinds
463 of occupations that require western education. At first, outsiders,
[167] often from the southern parts of Nigeria, were brought in to man the few essential jobs in the mechanical workshops, the hospitals, and the offices. Today, they are rapidly being replaced by northerners and in Bornu, itself, by Kanuri.